

Creating Accessible Documents in Word

How to Topic 00: Overview

This document complements the video
“Creating Accessible Documents in Word – Part 0: Overview” available at:
<https://laudatotech.com/2021/04/13/creating-accessible-documents-in-word-part-0/>



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Overview

This document introduces the “Creating Accessible Documents in Word” series of short videos with written equivalents for those who prefer text to video. The purpose of the series is to instruct authors who use Microsoft Word in creating documents that are accessible to the broadest possible range of perspective users.

WHY FOCUS ON MICROSOFT WORD?

Microsoft Word is a widely-used tool to create documents, accounting for a high percentage of published documents, either directly in native Word format, or converted to Adobe PDF or rich text format (RTF). Word is available as an application for the Windows, Macintosh, and Android platforms as well as a Web application as part of the free and premium versions of Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365).

The Word document format, as also implemented in somewhat-compatible products such as Google Docs, is ubiquitous in the higher education and business communities. As the source program used to create most published documents, it is important to learn to use Word to build documents that are accessible to all constituents.

To be accessible, a document’s content must function efficiently and effectively using accessibility applications such as screen readers and Braille displays. A document must be readable and understandable by people with low vision or color blindness, and navigable by individuals who cannot use a mouse (keyboard-only users).

COMMON ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES WITH WORD

The most common accessibility problems associated with Word documents are:

Table 1: Common Accessibility Issues with Word Documents

Issue	Explanation
Unclear Document Organization	Without properly-formatted headings, screen readers cannot interpret the structure of a document and keyboard-only users cannot effectively navigate a document.
Images Not Described	Without effective textual descriptions of all non-text content (images, photos, graphics, Word Art, etc.) people who are blind will not be able to comprehend the visual content.
Insufficient Contrast	People with low vision cannot read text nor discern images unless there is sufficient contrast between foreground and background.
Inappropriate Fonts	People with low vision cannot read text that is too small or is rendered in a busy font.
Confusing Lists	Information in lists that are not properly formatted is difficult to follow and sounds choppy and ineffective when read by a screen reader. Lists that are formatted using a <i>list style</i> are easier for screen readers to interpret.
Confusing Tables	Unless tables have header rows, they are difficult for screen readers to interpret. A properly-formatted table will enable the content to be clearly read in a left-to-right, top-to-bottom order.

Addressing the bulk of these issues is not extraordinarily difficult but does require a knowledge of Word deeper than most people possess. This series offers some guidelines for using Microsoft Word to create accessible, consistent, well-structured, and aesthetically pleasing documents.

TOPICS IN THIS SERIES

- Part 01: **Headings:** Covers the use of headings to enable document navigation for users of screen readers.
- Part 02: **Lists:** Covers how to create lists in a Word document so that screen readers will read them properly.
- Part 03: **Styles:** Reviews the importance of styles to screen reader navigation and introduces how styles work.
- Part 04: **Loose Ends:** Provides a demonstration of how the NVDA screen reader works, shows how to edit and save styles in a document template, and shows where document templates are stored on your computer.
- Part 05: **Tables:** Covers how to format tables for accessibility in Word.
- Part 06: **Alt Text:** Explains the use of alternative text to describe non-text content.
- Part 07: **Contrast:** Focuses on contrast, that is, the differences between two colors or shades of grey that make them distinguishable from one another.
- Part 08: **Using Color:** Deals with issues related to the use of color, including color blindness, color contrast, and aesthetics.
- Part 09: **Fonts:** Explores the use of fonts, including their type, size, and attributes.
- Part 10: **Links:** Explains how to create usable links to internal and external sources.
- Part 11: **Accessibility Checker:** Demonstrates how to use Microsoft's built-in accessibility checker.
- Part 12: **Summary:** Summarizes the major components of Microsoft Word and how they impact accessibility.

In this series, you will learn how to improve your ability to use Word and how to create documents that are accessible and that convey information effectively.